



WHAT IS LIVING EXPERIENCE?

Living experience is direct experience of living with a drug problem. This may include people who are currently using drugs and/or people who are accessing Medication Assisted Treatment or other forms of treatment and support.

WHY LIVING EXPERIENCE?

Since The Road to Recovery 2008 there has been increased input on the development of policy and practice locally and nationally by people with lived experience. This has been beneficial in terms of encouraging services to be more person centred and developing strategies that includes issues that affect people in recovery. Historically the 'lived experience' voice has tended to be from those in long term abstinent recovery. Whilst it is key to learn from these experiences also, it is important to recognise the voices of people in the midst of a drug problem have remained marginalised and disempowered.

People who are currently using drugs or accessing treatment may hold different attitudes and opinions from people in long term abstinent recovery for a number of reasons including:

- current experiences of services and treatment may be significantly different from what they were in the past
- drug trends, patterns of use and subsequent harms and treatment needs may differ from the past
- perspectives on past experiences from many years ago are impacted by factors such as time for reflection and the development of personal narratives, attitudes and adoption of ideologies towards drug use and recovery

It is therefore crucial to offer protected spaces for those with living experience with opportunity to feed in to wider lived experience spaces to ensure that both experiences are listened to and represented.

PROJECT AIMS

To ensure that the voice of living experience of the 60,000 men and women with drug problems is developed and enhanced in Scotland to inform and influence service development and delivery across Scotland at both local and national levels.

HOW WILL WE DO THIS?

Scottish Drugs Forum (SDF) have been funded by Scottish Government to develop regional living experience engagement groups which are a safe space for those with living experience to express their views. Groups generally meet weekly and are facilitated by members of the SDF living experience engagement staff team and local partner agencies who are interested in supporting groups with co-facilitation. Staff involved in facilitating groups all have lived experience.

Groups are fully independent of existing structures but can help inform other local reference or planning groups through providing representatives or feedback. SDF's role will be to support and foster groups' independence. As groups become established, group members are offered training and development in order to be able to facilitate groups themselves.

So far there are groups operational in Glasgow city, East Dunbartonshire, West Dunbartonshire, Borders and North Lanarkshire. Several others are being developed in other parts of Scotland with a view to having groups in all health board areas as a minimum. Members of the regional groups are given the opportunity to feed in to a national group which provides regular contributions to the Scottish Government National Collaborative. Living experience group members can also provide representation to local Lived Experience Panels or Alcohol and Drug Partnership sub groups.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE GROUPS?

Each group decides the agenda for weekly meetings to ensure they have a safe space to discuss the issues affecting them, and their needs and opinions. From already established groups, the kind of topics that have been discussed are:

- Local drug trends and specific harms
- Experiences of accessing Medication Assisted Treatment
- Facilitators and barriers for accessing drug and alcohol support
- Pathways to accessing additional support e.g. mental health

People who attend the groups are offered access to training on areas like naloxone, medication assisted treatment and harm reduction.



Through having local co-facilitators and local signposting protocols, anyone in need of immediate support who attends or who may be disengaged from services can be offered support to link in with local services as required.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE INFORMATION GATHERED?

Key points group members wish to share from meetings are minuted and shared with the local ADP and other relevant local agencies. Themes that may help inform national policy and practice are taken to the national living experience group and are shared with the Scottish Government through the national collaborative work.

WHAT SUPPORT IS NEEDED LOCALLY?

We invite ADP's and relevant local services and partner agencies to be part of a management group that would meet quarterly. This ensures that local feedback can be fed in to a central point on a regular basis and provides useful intelligence on issues such as drug trends or particular harms experienced by people who use drugs.

We would also be grateful to develop any local partnerships with services who may be able to support with provision of staff with lived experience to cofacilitate groups or who may be willing to be links in to support and treatment such as Injecting Equipment Provision, BBV testing, MAT, Mental Health and Physical Health care.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACT

Jason Wallace- Senior Development Officer
jason@sdf.org.uk

Katy MacLeod- Programme Manager
katy@sdf.org.uk